

# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney  
Carol C. Lam***

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***For Immediate Release***

**NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY** - October 1, 2004

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced the sentencing today of two defendants involved in smuggling a group of 21 undocumented aliens through the desert in Imperial County in a single Chevrolet Suburban, resulting in the deaths of four of the aliens. United States District Judge Irma E. Gonzalez sentenced VICTOR MANUEL VELASQUEZ-ROMERO to 60 months in prison followed by three years of supervised release. Judge Gonzalez also sentenced GUADALUPE FIERRO-CHAVEZ to 46 months in prison followed by three years of supervised released.

While en route from the Mexican border through the desert, the vehicle blew a tire and rolled over on Highway 78. Four of the aliens—Carlos Echevarria-Briebiezca, Rosalva Maldonado-Romero, Jose Refugio Ortega-Nieves, and a male juvenile—died in the accident. All others in the Suburban were injured, including the two defendants, VICTOR MANUEL VELASQUEZ-ROMERO and GUADALUPE FIERRO-CHAVEZ.

On June 16, 2004, as part of a plea agreement, the driver of the load vehicle, VELASQUEZ-ROMERO, pled guilty to: one count of bringing in an illegal alien, resulting in death; and three counts of

bringing in illegal aliens for financial gain. On the same day, under a separate plea agreement, FIERRO-CHAVEZ, the guide who led the group of aliens into the United States, pled guilty to: one count of bringing in an illegal alien, resulting in death; and one count of bringing in an illegal alien for financial gain.

United States Attorney Lam said, “We will continue to do all we can to punish smugglers, especially those who put others in harm’s way.”

## **DEFENDANTS**

Victor Manuel Velasquez-Romero

Guadalupe Fierro-Chavez

## **SUMMARY OF CHARGES**

### **Defendant VELASQUEZ-ROMERO**

One Count: Bringing in an Illegal Alien, Resulting in Death.

Violation: 8 U.S.C. § 1324(a)(1)(A)(I) and (B)(iv).

Maximum Penalty: Life imprisonment and/or a \$250,000 fine.

Three Counts: Bringing in an Illegal Alien for Financial Gain.

Violation: 8 U.S.C. § 1324(a)(2)(B)(ii).

Maximum Penalty: Ten years’ imprisonment with a minimum mandatory sentence of three years’ imprisonment for each count and/or a \$250,000 fine (as to Counts One and Two)

Maximum Penalty: Fifteen years’ imprisonment with a minimum mandatory sentence of five years’ imprisonment and/or a \$250,000 fine (as to Count Three)

### **Defendant FIERRO-CHAVEZ**

One Count: Bringing in an Illegal Alien, Resulting in Death.

Violation: 8 U.S.C. § 1324(a)(1)(A)(I) and (B)(iv).

Maximum Penalty: Life imprisonment and/or a \$250,000 fine.

One Count: Bringing in an Illegal Alien for Financial Gain.

Violation: 8 U.S.C. § 1324(a)(2)(B)(ii).

Maximum Penalty: Ten years’ imprisonment with a minimum mandatory sentence of three years’ imprisonment for each count and/or a \$250,000 fine

## **AGENCIES**

United States Border Patrol

United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security

California Highway Patrol

Imperial County Sheriff’s Office